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NEW MLA SURVEY SHOWS SIGNIFICANT INCREASES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY AT U.S. COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

**Language enrollments rise 13% from 2002; Arabic, up 127%,
hits #10 on the most studied list; Asian language study grows significantly**

(New York, NY) -- Interest in language study at American colleges and universities has increased broadly and significantly since 2002, according to a comprehensive new survey, *Enrollments in Languages Other Than English in United States Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 2006*, released today by the Modern Language Association of America (MLA) and funded by the United States Department of Education. The survey found significant increases in enrollments in nearly all of the most popular languages studied on American college campuses. Language enrollments on United States campuses are at their highest since the 1960 MLA survey.

Interest in language study has been increasing steadily since 1998. While the study of the most popular languages, Spanish, French, and German, continues to grow and together represents more than 70% of language enrollments, their dominance is slowly decreasing in the face of growing interest in languages such as Arabic (up 127%), Chinese (up 51%), and Korean (up 37%). Enrollments in American Sign Language increased nearly 30% from 2002, making it the fourth most studied language on college campuses, slightly ahead of Italian.

The more than doubling of Arabic enrollments moved the Middle Eastern language onto the top 10 most studied list for the first time. The number of institutions of higher learning offering Arabic has nearly doubled since the last survey, from 264 in 2002 to 466 Arabic programs offered in 2006.

“This significant growth in language study, and the diversity of languages being studied, is very good news for education in the United States,” said Rosemary G. Feal, executive director of the MLA. “Students increasingly see their futures taking place in a multilingual world, and they want language preparation to help them function in that world. Students recognize that having the ability to function across cultures and languages is an enormous advantage.”

The new MLA survey includes data from 2,795 colleges and universities measuring enrollments in the study of 219 languages other than English, from the most popular, including Spanish, French and German, to less commonly studied languages such as Navajo, Farsi, and Welsh.

Global Developments May Affect Language Choices

Trends in language enrollments appear to mirror significant national and global developments, including the rise of Asian economies, the steady increase of Spanish-speaking residents in the United States, and concerns about the gaps in understanding between English- and Arabic-speaking societies.

From 2002 to 2006, the enrollments in 11 of the 15 most popular languages grew faster than the overall 6.2% increase in the number of college students during that period. The most popular languages on college campuses in fall 2006 were:

<u>Language</u>	<u>Enrollments</u>	<u>% of All Language Enrollments</u>	<u>Increase since 2002</u>
1) Spanish	822,985	52.2%	+ 10.3%
2) French	206,426	13.1%	+ 2.2%
3) German	94,264	6.0%	+ 3.5%
4) American Sign Language	78,829	5.0%	+ 29.7%
5) Italian	78,368	5.0%	+ 22.6%
6) Japanese	66,605	4.2%	+ 27.5%
7) Chinese	51,582	3.3%	+ 51.0%
8) Latin	32,191	2.0%	+ 7.9%
9) Russian	24,845	1.6%	+ 3.9%
10) Arabic	23,974	1.5%	+126.5%
11) Ancient Greek	22,849	1.4%	+ 12.1%
12) Biblical Hebrew	14,140	0.9%	- 0.3%
13) Portuguese	10,267	0.7%	+ 22.4%
14) Modern Hebrew	9,612	0.6%	+ 11.5%
15) Korean	7,145	0.5%	+ 37.1%

The MLA survey also found a 31.2% increase in the number of languages outside the top 15 (known as less commonly taught languages, or LCTLs) being offered for study. These LCTLs include languages such as Swahili, Persian, Hindi, and Catalan. A total of 204 LCTLs were offered for study on American campuses in 2006, up from 162 offered in 2002. The largest increases in LCTLs were found in Middle Eastern and African languages, where enrollments grew by 55.9% between 2002 and 2006.

United States Language Study Still Far Short of Historic Highs

While interest in language study is high, the current rate of 8.6 language course enrollments per 100 total student enrollments is still well short of the 1965 rate of 16.5 language course enrollments per 100 total student enrollments, which was the highest rate recorded in the forty-eight years that the MLA has conducted this survey.

For the first time, the 2006 MLA survey also compared enrollment figures for introductory (first- and second-year) versus advanced language study. Students are

nearly five times more likely to be enrolled in a first- or second-year course than in advanced language study. While increasing numbers and proportions of students are taking introductory language classes, the majority do not pursue the advanced study necessary to achieve fluency.

“We are still a long way from a golden age of language study, when fluency in foreign languages is seen as a key part of a college education,” noted Michael Holquist, president of the MLA. “Higher education today is offering students more areas of study, like information technology. We are encouraged to see that in this stimulating educational environment, students are increasingly recognizing the importance of language study.”

Methodology

The survey reports information from 99.8% (2,795) of the 2,801 accredited, not-for-profit, AA-, BA-, MA-, and PhD-granting colleges and universities in the United States that regularly teach languages. Registrars and other school representatives were contacted by the MLA by mail, telephone, and e-mail. The MLA database was supplemented with information from the National Center for Education Statistics to ensure that all eligible institutions were accounted for. Responses came from 966 two-year colleges and 1,829 four-year institutions.

The survey measures enrollments, not the number of students studying a language other than English. Since one student may enroll in more than one language course, a single student may be counted more than once. The ratio of language course enrollments to total students is, however, a figure that, over time, can serve as an important indicator of student interest in the study of languages.

About the Modern Language Association

Founded in 1883, the Modern Language Association of America provides opportunities for its members to share their scholarly findings and teaching experiences with colleagues and to discuss trends in the academy. For over a hundred years, members have worked to strengthen the study and teaching of language and literature. MLA members sustain one of the finest publishing programs in the humanities.

The MLA Language Map (www.mla.org/map_main) and its Data Center provide information about more than 47,000,000 people in the United States who speak languages other than English at home.

The MLA weekly radio program, *What's the Word?*, can be heard on more than 160 radio stations across the United States. The 2007 MLA Annual Convention will be held in Chicago, 27–30 December.

For more information about the MLA, please visit our Web site (www.mla.org).

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